United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 1, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Defense Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
115 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Ranking Member, Defense Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
711 Hart Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Durbin:

As you clearly know, and our own national security experts have warned us about and demonstrated yesterday, North Korean ballistic missiles will have the capability of striking the United States by the end of 2018 with a thermonuclear warhead. We greatly appreciate the robust $9.3 billion, which is $1.4 billion above the President's request, in funding for missile defense to counter the growing threat.

To appropriately address these threats, the Trump Administration has requested an additional $4 billion supplemental appropriation for missile defense, with a specific emphasis on enhancing our ground-based missile defenses against a potential attack by North Korea. Specifically, the request also calls for appropriations to support the development of new technologies for missile defense.

We support the overall supplemental request, and, in particular, the provision allocating funding for new missile defense technologies and urge the Appropriations Committee to designate $100 million for the rapid development and deployment of new kinetic Boost Phase missile defense technology. This is in line with the recently passed National Defense Authorization Act for 2018 which included a provision calling for the Department of Defense to develop such a Boost Phase Intercept system "as soon as practicable."

The emerging technology, known as High Altitude Long Endurance kinetic Boost Phase Intercept (HALE BPI), would use existing remotely piloted unmanned vehicles as a launch platform capable of long loitering times in international airspace at a safe stand-off distance over international waters. When fielded, this system could detect and engage North Korean missiles in their boost phase and potentially confine North Korean ICBMs to airspace over (or close to) North Korea—protecting American families and our allies.

The system is technologically viable, relatively inexpensive and can be built within 12-18 months. The hosting platforms (long endurance drones) and detection technology required for such a system already exist. The missile interceptor required for the system to work effectively will require minor technological modifications of already existing missiles along with overall integration efforts to make the entire system viable.

This new technology will be integral in the overall United States ballistic missile defense capability. It deserves appropriate funding and development to offer the best opportunity for a layered defense to defeat North Korea ballistic missiles. We appreciate the leadership and consideration of the Committee throughout the appropriations process.

Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

James M. Inhofe
United States Senator

Dan Sullivan
United States Senator